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October 24, 1896.

Vol. I. No. 28.

Price Five Cents.

FRANK MERRIWELL IN GORILLA LAND OR THE SEARCH FOR THE MISSING LINK

By the Author of

"FRANK MERRIWELL"



"BE STILL, ELSIE," WARNED FRANK IN A CALM VOICE. "I WILL SHOOT THE BRUTE THROUGH THE HEAD."

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CHAPTER I.

LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM.

The schooner Saucy Susan, Justin Bellwood, master, lay at anchor in the Fernand Vas River, near the west coast of Africa.

The Saucy Susan was a trader, loaded with cloth, beads, powder, bullets, old muskets, brass and iron kettles, and such other articles as the natives of the country were most likely to prize.

In exchange Captain Bellwood hoped to secure a cargo of ivory, mahogany, and a few skins of wild beasts.

Frank Merriwell and Ephraim Gallup were passengers on the Saucy Susan, having been taken aboard from an island upon which they had been cast by the wrecking of another vessel, the Sea Fox.

Austin Ross, a self-appointed detective, who had been searching for Ethel Driscoll, a lost heiress, had also been cast upon this island, where he had found his heiress, through the instrumentality of Frank, who became king of the natives when the savage king was struck dead by lightning just as he was on the point of condemning his white captives to be slain and eaten.

Ross and Miss Driscoll had been placed on board a vessel bound for New York.

Ethel Driscoll had admired Frank Merriwell greatly, and she had told him over and over that, if it were true that she had been left a fortune by her uncle, she should give him some token of remembrance in reward for his bravery in saving her from Bondalwe, a giant islander, who had tried to make her become his wife.

Frank, with his usual gallantry, had assured Ethel that he had been a thousand times rewarded by his satisfaction in being of service to her.

But that did not satisfy the girl, who was pretty and refined, for all that she had been some time among the natives of the island, the old king having adopted her as his daughter.

She was greatly fascinated by Frank, and she was plainly determined to see him again when he should return to the United States. That was why she insisted on giving him something as a remembrance token.

Elsie Bellwood was relieved when Ethel was placed on board the vessel bound for New York.

Although the two girls had become warm friends in a very short time, as girls usually do, Elsie had secretly been very jealous of Ethel.

In the past Elsie had been in love with Frank, but had tried to forget him, know-

ing he was loved by another girl, Inza Burrage, who had befriended Elsie when Captain Bellwood lost a vessel on Tiger Tooth Ledge, off Fardale village.

Feeling that it would be a mean thing to attempt to "cut out" Inza, Elsie had struggled to tear Frank Merriwell's image from her heart—had even repulsed him when he betrayed more than friendly interest in her.

But now Elsie began to believe it was useless for her to fight against her own heart. She had said, over and over, that she hoped she might never again meet Frank, but fate flung them together in the most remarkable manner, so that the girl began to feel that it was useless to struggle against destiny.

It was with her lips alone that she had said she hoped she might never again meet Frank. All the while, in her heart, she was longing to meet him.

As for Frank, he was not certain of himself no further than that, in a certain way, he felt bound to Inza, having known her first. It was true that it had been a case of boy and girl love between them, and that they had not spoken seriously of their affection, but there had seemed to be a tacit understanding that made them more than lovers for the moment.

In his dreams Frank sometimes saw dark-eyed Inza hovering near him, and sometimes it was Elsie, with her golden hair and "eyes of tender blue."

Inza seemed to wield a strange and potent power over him when she was near, while Elsie appealed to the tenderer side of his nature. Inza he admired for her beauty, her ready wit, and her self reliance; but Elsie was a girl to shield and protect, to shelter from every ill wind and harm.

Frank saw there was something the trouble with Elsie, even after Ethel Driscoll had left the schooner. She seemed to avoid him, and he fancied there was a shadow on her pretty face.

He was determined to know what this meant, and he watched till he found a good opportunity to corner her so she could not escape. Then he questioned her.

At first Elsie declared there was nothing the matter; but, by skilful questioning, Frank finally obtained an inkling of the truth. He laughed at her.

"Surely you are not jealous of Miss Driscoll!" he exclaimed, reproachfully.

Elsie hung her head, her cheeks crimson.

"Foolish girl!" cried Frank. "Why, Ethel Driscoll is nothing to me. She was very unfortunate, and it was out of politeness that I treated her with the greatest consideration."

"She is an heiress," said Elsie.

"What of that? I have a few dollars of my own."

"And she is very pretty."

"There are others."

"She is in love with you."

"Nonsense!"

"It is true."

"How do you know?"

"She told me so."

Frank whistled.

"This is interesting!"

"You act as if you did not suspect it before."

"Well, I did not. She seemed very grateful to me for saving her from the cannibals; but I did not fancy she had fallen in love with me. Are you sure, Elsie?"

"Of course I am."

"Well, don't let it worry you."

"You do not care for her?"

"I think she is a charming girl, but I am not in love with her, Elsie. How could I be with you near?"

He had secured her hand. She tried to draw it away, but he held it fast and captured the other one. He bent nearer and nearer, his eyes on her face.

"Elsie," he half whispered, "the last time we met was in the Great Dismal

Swamp of Florida. Then I told you how often I had thought of you—how often I had dreamed of you.”

“Have you forgotten——”

She checked herself, unable to utter Inza’s name. She was trembling a little, and the warm color was coming and going in her cheeks. Never had she looked prettier than at that moment.

Frank felt his heart fluttering in his bosom, and one arm slipped about her waist. He drew her close to him, and held her there, as he hastily went on.

“I have forgotten nothing, Elsie. Fate has not been kind to us in everything, but has persisted in flinging us together. It has convinced me that there is something that draws us one to the other. Fate was not kind to us when it brought us together so late the first time. And still we were but boy and girl—we are still. Perhaps we regard these matters too seriously——”

“No, no, Frank—I am sure not.”

“Elsie, little sweetheart!”

Her head was bowed still lower, and her breath caused her lips to flutter. She did not speak.

“Elsie, I tell you the truth when I say that I think of you oftener than of any other. You come to me oftener in my dreams. I see you near me, with your sky-blue eyes, your sunshiny hair, your lips like cupid’s bow, and your smile like a summer’s morning. I have dreamed that you came to me and whispered over and over, ‘I love you, Frank, I shall always love you, and I shall love no other.’”

She was silent, enchanted; but her heart was throbbing wild with pleasure that was painful. She had pictured this moment to herself, and now it had come.

Frank, quite unconsciously, was becoming poetical. He did not pause to form his phrases, but they came from his lips despite himself. Had he thought what he was saying, he would have hesitated and

regarded the language as stilted and unnatural; but, as he did not pause to consider, his words were the natural expression of the feelings within his heart.

“Sweetheart,” he continued, “we are together now, so let’s forget the past—let’s be happy for the present. The future will give us what is our due.”

“Oh, Frank! how can I be quite happy when I think of her—when I think that I may be doing such a mean thing?”

“Elsie, we will write to her—we will tell her everything. We are still very young. We may think now that we shall never, never care for anybody else; but I have read a hundred times that youth is changeable.”

“I care not what you have read, Frank, I know my heart will never change.”

He drew her still closer and kissed her, murmuring:

“Dear little Elsie!”

A gruff cough sounded behind them, causing them to part and turn in no little consternation.

Captain Bellwood was standing near at hand, with his back toward them, surveying the cloudless sky in a nautical fashion.

“For all that it’s so calm now, there may be a storm kicking up,” he said. “The air seems very close around here.”

CHAPTER II.

THE MISSING LINK.

The second day after the Saucy Susan dropped anchor in the Fernand Vas, a white man came on board, brought off in one of the native boats.

He was a thin, long-necked, red-nosed man, wearing spectacles, and having an unmistakably scholarly air, despite the fact that he was dressed in coarse, stout clothing and heavy boots.

He introduced himself as Professor Johnson Bonner, a famous naturalist. Frank had heard of Professor Bonner, and so was interested in the man at once.

The professor explained that he had been left there eight days before by an English vessel, and had just completed preparations for an extensive trip into the interior.

"To confess the truth," smiled the lanky professor, "my mission is a most remarkable one."

"Then you are not going inland to trade?" asked Captain Bellwood.

"No, sir. I have quite a different object in view."

"If you were going to trade, the natives here might cause you trouble and delay."

"I have found that out. They are very jealous of their privilege to trade with the white men who come to the coast, and they do not wish the white men to reach the interior tribes, from whom the finest ivory, and, in fact, nearly all things of value to the trader come."

Captain Bellwood knew this well enough, having made several trading voyages along the African coast.

"Their jealousy made it quite difficult for me to get away with my loads of goods," Professor Bonner went on. "Now I have it all arranged. They understand why I am carrying so many bundles."

"And why are you, if you are not going to the interior to trade?"

"My dear captain, I shall be forced to purchase my passage inland, and so I must have a plentiful supply of goods or presents."

The old salt nodded.

"Very good, professor," he said. "I asked the question to see if you knew what you were doing. It is evident you do."

The tall man drew himself up stiffly.

"You are not the first person to hint that I am on a crazy search," he said; "but I will show them—I will show the world a wonder that shall make me famous for all time."

Frank Merriwell was listening atten-

tively, and he was curious to know why Professor Bonner contemplated visiting the interior. It was evident the man was not going on an exploring expedition, and he had stated that he was not going for the purpose of trading. He did not appear like a hunter who was about to make the dangerous venture in search of big game, and his language had revealed that he was going in search for something.

Captain Bellwood was not a little curious himself.

"Professor," he said, "you make me inquisitive—I trust not impertinent. Would you mind telling us why you are going inland amid savage tribes of black men and ten thousand dangers of which you know nothing at all?"

"Ah—ahem!" coughed the professor. "Of course I do not mind. In fact, I came here to tell you, to see if you have not a man—a faithful and brave fellow—you can spare me as a companion. I need such a companion."

The captain shook his head.

"I fear I cannot spare a man of my crew," he said.

"Wait," urged Bonner. "I may be able to make such a man famous. His name may be printed in newspapers all over the world as the companion of Professor Bonner, who made the most wonderful discovery ever known."

"My curiosity increases," admitted the captain. "Go on. What is the object of your expedition?"

The professor took a roll of parchment from a little case, and spread it out before the captain.

"See this," he directed. "This is a chart of the course I mean to follow, and the unknown land I hope to reach. See this dotted line. It runs up the Rembo, crosses the Oviguli, Louvendji, Agouyai, and other rivers; it passes through the land of the Commi, Bakalai, Apono, Ashango, and other tribes; it continues through the lands of the Dwarfs; and

here it comes to a region that has never been explored by white men."

"All that is interesting; but why should you desire to make such a journey, if not for exploration? Only a fool would think of going so far inland to trade, and I do not take you for a fool, professor."

"Some do," said the tall man, dryly. "As I have said, that region right there"—indicating point on chart with his finger—"has never been explored by white men. A white man once reached its border, and that not so very long ago. He had a photographic outfit with him, and he brought back some remarkable pictures. I have one here. Look at it, captain."

He removed the photograph from a leather pocket, and placed it on the chart before Captain Bellwood.

"Why, it's a gorilla!" exclaimed the master of the Saucy Susan. "And yet—and yet——"

"And yet it is not a gorilla—exactly so. You see, it much more resembles a hairy man, with a very short stump of a tail. Its arms are not so long as those of a gorilla, who walks on all fours, standing in a half upright position. Its head is far better formed than that of a gorilla. The nose is not so flat, the teeth less prominent, the ear better formed, and the forehead higher. It is a creature of much greater intelligence than the gorilla, and still it is not a man, as the stump of a tail plainly indicates."

"Well, well!" exclaimed Captain Bellwood. "I am growing strangely interested. If this creature is not a gorilla and is not a man, what is it?"

"The Missing Link!"

"What?"

"This is the missing bond that unites man with the beasts!" cried Professor Bonner, excitedly and confidently. "There is no doubt of it, sir."

"Oh, say! I can't take stock in that theory, for I do not believe in evolution."

"You may not believe in evolution

now, but you will in a very few years, if you live so long. My dear captain, I am on one of the most momentous expeditions ever attempted by a human being."

"You are going to penetrate this unknown land in search of this creature, which you call the Missing Link?"

"Exactly. And I shall not return till I have captured or killed one of these creatures. I do not wish to kill one, as it would seem very much like murder; but, if I cannot capture one, the advancement of scientific discovery and the broadening of human knowledge will nerve my hand to slay one. Even though I felt myself a murderer, even though I might be regarded as a murderer, I should consider it my duty to mankind to establish, beyond the shadow of doubt, that there is such a creature as the Missing Link."

Frank Merriwell was feverishly interested. He longed to ask some questions, but held himself silent in the presence of the captain and the professor.

Captain Bellwood was incredulous, as was plainly evident.

"How long ago was this picture taken, professor?" he asked.

"Not more than two years ago. I do not know the exact date when it was taken, but it was about two years ago."

"By whom was it taken?"

"By Professor William Riding, of the University of Healdsburg, a gentleman, a scholar, a man of honor, and a man of veracity."

"How did he happen to be where he could obtain such a picture?"

"He heard stories of this being—sailors' stories. He even found a sailor who professed to have penetrated to the country where the creatures are and have seen one of them. That aroused his curiosity. He found a wealthy man who was willing to back him, and he organized an expedition to penetrate to this land and bring back absolute proof of the existence of the Missing Link. He carried out his project

to a certain extent, for he reached the country where the man monkeys are, and obtained this photograph. Then a terrible misfortune befell him. He was wounded by the poisoned arrow, and he never recovered, although he lived many months thereafter. His health failing, he was forced to give over his project and return to his home. From his own lips I learned enough to satisfy me that the Missing Link is no myth. When he died, I promised to complete the work he left unfinished, and here I am. That is a full and complete explanation of how I happened to start out on this expedition."

Frank saw the man was sincere and in earnest. Professor Bonner had not a single doubt concerning the existence of the Missing Link.

"But this creature of which you have a picture may be no more than a wild man—an outcast from the natives near where he was discovered," said Captain Bellwood.

"Look at that!"

Bonner pointed triumphantly to the stubby tail exhibited in the photograph.

"That proves the creature is not an ordinary wild man who has been cast out from some of the savage tribes," declared the professor. "Now, Captain Bellwood, I have made every arrangement for this expedition; but desire the companionship and aid of at least one white man, and I have come to see if you haven't a sailor who will accompany me—a man you can spare."

"I am sorry," said the master of the Saucy Susan; "but I do not feel that I can spare a single man, professor. The crew

"If there is none of the crew who can go, there is a passenger who will accompany you, Professor Bonner," said Frank Merriwell, quietly.

The professor looked sharply at the boy, peering over his spectacles.

"Eh?" he grunted. "A passenger, did you say?"

"I did, sir."

"What passenger?"

"I will go myself, if you will take me."

CHAPTER III.

PREPARING FOR THE START.

Professor Bonner pursed up his lips, looked very much surprised, and shook his head in a decidedly decisive manner.

"You?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why, you are a mere stripling."

Frank flushed a bit, but remained cool.

"I know I am young in years, but I have traveled some, and I have had many experiences, passing through not a few dangers. I do not wish to boast, but I will say that you might take many men who would not prove as valuable as myself."

"Besides that," smiled Captain Bellwood, "if you take Mr. Merriwell, you will be constantly in royal society. Mr. Merriwell was lately the king of the Wedolbas."

"The Wedolbas?" repeated Professor Bonner, questioningly. "Who are the Wedolbas?"

The master of the Saucy Susan explained how the boy had been wrecked on an island inhabited by cannibals and had saved himself and his companions from being slain and devoured, making the cannibals believe he had supernatural power, and thus becoming king in place of the former monarch, who was killed by a stroke of lightning.

Professor Bonner gazed at the boy with increasing interest, which led him to ask still further questions. In a short time he had learned enough about Frank Merriwell to convince him that the youth was no ordinary "stripling."

"But how is it you are traveling round the world in such a manner?" questioned

the professor. "I should not think your parents would permit it."

"My mother is dead," explained Frank, "and my father has not bothered himself about me for a number of years. My uncle, who was very eccentric, left me his fortune, and provided, in his will, that I should travel in company with my guardian, in order to obtain a wider knowledge of the world."

"Hum!" grunted the professor. "But where is your guardian?"

"On his way to Europe by this time, I expect, if my last letter, which was mailed at Buenos Ayres, reached him."

"And here you are in Africa. When and where do you expect to meet him?"

"I do not know. I shall write him at the first opportunity, and the letter will be forwarded by my London bankers."

Bonner pursed up his lips and whistled, canting his head to one side, and regarding the boy in a manner that made Frank think of the herons he had seen in Florida when they were watching something in the water near their feet.

"A remarkable boy!" mumbled the professor—"a most remarkable boy! He has the air and bearing of a man of the world. I should much enjoy having him for a companion."

Frank's heart gave a thump of satisfaction.

"Then take me along with you," he urged. "I'll guarantee that I will not prove an incumbrance."

"My dear boy, you know nothing of the dangers we must encounter, the perils of the forest and jungle, the wild beasts, the savage men, the venomous reptiles, the danger of fevers and strange diseases. No, my boy, I do not think I dare take you."

Frank's heart sank in his bosom.

"I think you are making a mistake, professor," he said, with an air of disappointment. "I know my age counts against me in your eyes; but still I think

you would take me along if you knew my guardian would not make trouble about it."

"I might," was the confession.

"Well, I can assure you that Professor Scotch——"

"Professor who?" cried Bonner. "Not Horace Scotch, of Fardale?"

"Exactly. Professor Horace Scotch is my guardian."

"Why, we were boys together—school-mates!" cried the scientist. "I have not seen Hoddy for years; but I have not forgotten him. And he is your guardian? Well, well, well!"

Frank fancied he saw an opportunity to gain the object he so much desired, and he worked for it with a will. He explained that Professor Scotch was more of a companion than a guardian, that the professor seldom or never objected to anything Frank wished to do, that he had been traveling alone since his sudden expedition into South America, and that Scotch would be delighted to know that his *protege* was in such excellent company as his old comrade and schoolmate, Johnson Bonner.

The boy played his cards skilfully, and Professor Bonner finally succumbed, after appealing to Captain Bellwood, who was forced to acknowledge that he believed the lad would be a most valuable and trustworthy companion.

"All right," said the scientist, "I start to-morrow morning as early as possible, and you must be on hand. I am stopping at the upper village, which you have not yet visited, and it would be well for you to come up this afternoon and talk matters over with me. Will you come?"

Frank agreed to come, and the professor finally took his leave, his last words being an expression of doubt as to the wisdom of taking a boy along.

When Frank told Ephraim Gallup that

he was going with Professor Bonner, the boy from Vermont quietly observed:

"Gol derned ef I ain't goin' too. Yeou can't lose me, Frank."

Frank spoke of the dangers and hardships; but Ephraim was not disturbed in the least.

"What yeou s'pose I keer fer them things!" he cried. "I may kick up some, an' say I wish I was to hum; but yeou'd oughter know I kin fight when I hev to, an' I kin stand some knockin' araound. I tell yeou I am goin' along."

"Perhaps Professor Bonner will not have you."

"He'll have to have me, by gum! I'll jest go along, anyway."

So Ephraim accompanied Frank when the latter visited the professor at the upper village that afternoon.

Professor Bonner objected vigorously to taking two boys; but Frank told some "large yarns" about Ephraim's ability and bravery, and the man finally gave in.

The professor had a large stock of goods, all of which were made into bundles for carrying, but were to be transported in boats as far as possible.

He explained that he should take twenty boatmen and porters from the Commi people, among whom he was stopping. The Commi could be depended upon, being brave and hardy, and comparatively honest. Some of the tribes inland were noted for their treachery and dishonesty.

The professor had taken care to provide himself with the most modern weapons, revolvers and magazine rifles. He was also able to supply Frank and Ephraim with such weapons.

"It is very likely we may have to do some fighting," he said. "Some of the inland tribes will not let us pass without trouble, that is pretty sure."

"Can you shoot, professor?" asked Frank.

"Well, I know how to fire a rifle, but

I am no great marksman. How about yourself?"

Frank picked up one of the handsome Winchester rifles.

"See the bright-colored bird on the very tip of yonder tree?" he asked.

"Yes, I see the bird. It is scarcely possible you fancy you can touch it at such a distance."

Frank made no reply, but brought the rifle to his shoulder, took swift but accurate aim, and fired.

There was an exploding puff of bright-colored feathers, and the bird, shattered by the bullet, fell from the tree.

"Good gracious!" gasped Professor Bonner, in a dazed way. "It is really marvelous—if it was not an accident."

"Wal, it wa'n't no accident," said Ephraim Gallup. "An' that ain't northin' side of the shootin' I've seen him do."

Some of the natives had seen the shot, and they uttered loud cries of astonishment and admiration. Frank was regarded as a great wizard, and the chief of the village immediately sent to him to see his "fetich," or charm.

In Africa every native has a fetich. Some are to prevent sickness, some to protect from wizards, some to make the owners great hunters, or for hundreds of other things.

The fetiches are made from all sorts of things, such as birds' claws, monkey's teeth, hair, snake skins, human bones, and so forth.

Frank and Ephraim finally returned to the Saucy Susan and made ready for the expedition.

When Frank next met Elsie he found the girl very sad and dejected.

"Cheer up, little sweetheart," smiled the light-hearted lad. "You are looking as if you did not expect ever to see me again."

"I fear I never shall," she said, gloomily. "You are going into a land of fevers and unknown diseases, to say noth-

ing of other perils. Oh! Frank, why do you go? I was so happy, thinking you would remain with us for some time!"

"You know I am determined to see all the world I can, Elsie; and I shall not find another opportunity like this. Besides that, just think what it means if it should be true that the Missing Link has been discovered in the wilds of Africa—if we should capture one of the creatures and bring it out alive. It would make us all famous the world over."

"What is fame, Frank! Life, health, and happiness are far preferable. For my sake, won't you give up this foolish expedition, Frank?"

Frank was placed in an unpleasant and embarrassing position. It took him some time to convince Elsie that she was asking too much of him, but he finally succeeded, and she gave up.

But they were together a long time, and Captain Bellwood did not interrupt their love making.

CHAPTER IV.

A CRY IN THE NIGHT.

Frank and Ephraim were on hand early in the morning for the start, which Professor Bonner had anticipated would be made at sunrise.

But the professor was not yet familiar with the ways of the black people. Before the start could be made there were speech-making, farewells, and strange ceremonies. And when these things had been gone through and everything seemed ready for the start, the twenty natives who were to accompany the professor had to rush back and go all through it again.

All this took much time, and the sun was well up before the start was made. At last the boats were off. The throng of blacks on the shore fired a salute from their guns and yelled like maniacs; the blacks in the boats fired a salute in response and yelled like fiends.

"Gol dern my skin ef I ever saw such a passel of yee-haw critters!" exclaimed Ephraim. "They kin make more noise than a menagerie uv wildcats."

"They certainly seem to have good lungs," laughed Frank.

Up the Fernand Vas they paddled, and, at nightfall, they camped near where the Rembo emptied into the larger river.

Frank never forgot that first night camp. Several fires were built, and brush houses were hastily constructed. After supper the Commi men sat about the fires and smoked and jabbered, the firelight flaring on their black skins, their eyes rolling, their white teeth showing, and their arms being flung about in strange gestures. They were telling hunting yarns, and it seemed that each one was striving to tell a more improbable lie than any of the others.

Frank and Ephraim lay on some blankets and watched the singular scene, while Professor Bonner sat near one of the fires, writing in his journal, making a record of the first day's journey.

"Well, Ephraim," said Frank, "here we are well started on the most remarkable search ever undertaken by human beings."

"That's so, Frank," nodded the Vermonter. "I be gol derved ef it don't seem like I was dreamin' all this."

"It is no dream; but it is a strange reality."

"Nobody'd ever thought that I'd be here. Folks up in aour taown never suspected me nor Hiram, my brother'd, 'mount to much; but Hi he went to Chilly, where he's making money hand over fist, an' I'm travelin' araound the world."

"You are traveling around the world, even though you sometimes wish you were back home on the farm."

"Wal," said Ephraim, a bit sheepishly, "anybody'd kainder wish they was to hum ef they was captured by cannibals as

was jest goin' to eat 'em up. Ef it hedn't bin for yeou, Frank, the cannibuls'd made a meal off me sure as hens lay aigs."

"There are cannibals in Africa."

"Git aout!"

"Lots of them. The Fans are said to eat people who die of natural causes."

"Oh, the gol dern critters! It can't be they know anything a tall."

"On the contrary, they are said to be one of the finest and most intelligent appearing races in Africa. They are splendidly built, both men and women, are skilled workers in iron, make the finest spears, knives, axes, and other implements, and are brave and warlike."

"Dinged ef that don't beat me! Anybody'd think that critters what eat dead folks would be sickly an' scrawny an' good-for-northin'."

"It is probable that the Fans were not cannibals originally, but were driven to eat human flesh from necessity during some time of famine. In that way the habit came upon them. They do not eat their own people who die of diseases, but exchange them for others."

"Haow in thunder is it that yeou alwus know so much abaout every place where yeou go?" asked the boy from Vermont, wonderingly.

Frank smiled.

"That is easy. I make it a practice to obtain all the information possible about the countries I mean to visit, so that when I get back home I shall really know something of the world."

"That's a great idee."

"In this way, I feel that I am carrying out the design of my Uncle Asher, who provided by his will that I should travel in order to broaden my knowledge of the world and humanity."

"Haow'd yeou find aout so much about this part of Afriky? Yeou didn't know for sure that yeou was goin' to visit this coast till we was taken off Phantom Island by Cap'n Bellwood."

"Captain Bellwood is a man who believes in knowing something of the people with whom he intends to do business, and he has a number of authentic books on Africa and its inhabitants."

"An' yeou was readin' uv 'em ev'ry day, I remember that. Wal, Frank, you're baound to be a great man some time. Yeou'll know a heap."

"It is not absolutely necessary to travel in order to become well informed concerning the world and its inhabitants. Any boy who has the ambition may acquire a vast store of knowledge by reading books of travel, and well-written books of travel are as fascinating as novels."

"By gum! I'm goin' to read more uv that kind uv stuff arter this. I don't expect to travel all over the world, same as yeou will; but what I have traveled makes me want to know moare abaout the world than I do. At the same time, I don't care much abaout havin' anything to do with no more cannibuls."

"Well, you are not likely to, for we pass to the south of the Fan country, so we shall not see the cannibals. But we are going through a country inhabited by people far more dangerous than cannibals."

"Git aout!"

"That is right."

"Who be they?"

"The Bakalai."

"What's the matter with them?"

"They are very treacherous and untrustworthy."

"Is that all?"

"No. At the very moment when they appear the most friendly they may be plotting to murder one. And they use poisoned arrows."

"Wal, dern their skins!"

"The heads of their arrows are so attached to the shaft that, if the arrow penetrates beyond the barbed head, an attempt to pull it out will leave the poisoned head in the wound."

"By what yeou say abaout them, I shore to welcome the white men. They should judge the Bakalai are real nice people! They'd oughter go to war with the cannibuls, an' both sides fight till everybody was killed dead."

The boys lay and talked till they became drowsy, and they finally wrapped themselves in their blankets and slept.

Some time in the night they were aroused by the frightful screech of a leopard; but the natives hastily stirred up the fires and the creature did not approach the camp.

The next morning they pushed on up the Rembo, which was rather narrow and swift where it emptied into the Fernand Vas, but became broader and easier to navigate as they progressed.

On both sides of the river the foliage was like a dense green wall, dotted here and there with bright flowers. Bright-plumed birds cut the air overhead, monkeys chattered in the trees, crocodiles slipped into the water from muddy banks on which they had been sunning themselves, and once some elephants that had been near the river took to their heels and disappeared amid the trees, which crashed and swayed as they went.

Frank caught up his rifle and fired after the elephants, but the creatures were out of sight before he could get a shot, so he had to fire by chance, and it seemed that he did not wound one of the creatures.

Both boys were kept constantly interested and on the alert by what they both saw about them. Everything seemed novel and strange, and the day passed swiftly.

Near night the boats approached Goumbi, a large village. One of the smaller boats was sent forward, so the inhabitants of the town might be notified that three white men were coming to visit them.

When Goumbi was approached all the inhabitants of the village were on the

shore to welcome the white men. They danced, shouted, sang, and fired guns.

"Gol dern the critters!" muttered Ephraim, clutching his rifle. "They act like they was itchin' to chaw us up."

"That is their way of greeting us," explained Professor Bonner. "They expect me to stay with them some time and trade, and they will be greatly disappointed when they learn that I mean to go on in the morning."

As the boats approached the shore, Frank stood up, pointed his Winchester into the air, and fired six shots in bewilderingly rapid succession.

The natives were astounded and frightened. All their guns were old fashioned muzzle loaders, and they had never seen a repeating rifle. It seemed marvelous to them that a gun could shoot so many times without reloading, and some of them ran away and concealed themselves, fearing the "white wizards" too much to face them.

The king, although greatly agitated, greeted the professor and the boys, saying he was glad they had come, and making them presents of goats and plantains.

Professor Bonner made a brief speech, in which he assured the king that he had come to do him good, and ended by making the old fellow a present of a bright-red jacket, which the king immediately donned, grinning with delight and dancing about like a jubilant schoolboy.

A house was given the professor and the boys for their occupancy while they remained in the village. The professor took care that his goods were stowed away for the night and carefully guarded.

Later on there was a great pow-wow, in which the villagers and the three white visitors took part.

The professor presented the king's ten wives each with a string of bright-colored beads, and explained that he had not come to trade, but was going inland to hunt.

This was something the natives could not understand, and they appeared to doubt the white man's word.

At last the professor was forced to show his photograph of the "Missing Link" to the chief, and explain that he was going in search of that creature, hoping to capture one alive, and take it to the white man's country, where he could make much money by exhibiting it.

The king was finally forced to be satisfied with Bonner's statements, but he professed great grief over the short stay the whites were to make with him.

The inhabitants of Goumbi told frightful tales of the great perils to be encountered farther on, plainly striving to frighten the party from proceeding, but Bonner laughed at all these yarns, and insisted that he should go forward in the morning.

That night Frank slept soundly, but, despite the heaviness of his slumber, he was aroused by a cry that seemed to come from the river. He started up and listened.

All seemed silent, save for the snoring of Ephraim and the professor, who slept on without a break.

Somehow that cry had stirred the blood in Frank's body. He arose and went out where he could listen without hearing the snoring so plainly.

As he reached the open air, another cry, broken and smothered, coming from a far distance, was indistinctly heard.

It seemed like the call of a woman in distress, and it affected the boy strangely, even though he had heard of wild beasts that uttered such weird sounds.

He crept back into the hut, a heavy chill upon him. Although he lay down and closed his eyes, his sleep was no longer peaceful and refreshing. All through the rest of the night he dreamed of Elsie—dreamed she was in some frightful peril.

CHAPTER V.

RESULT OF THE HUNT.

When morning came the king still objected to the departure of the expedition, but finally agreed to let the party go on if Professor Bonner would pay a certain price in cloth and beads.

The professor was angry. He ordered his men to make ready to start without delay, and, when the king ordered out his fighting men and offered to prevent this, the professor threatened him with disaster and ruin.

But Frank Merriwell took a far more effective way to induce the old monarch to let them depart. He promptly leveled his rifle at the king's head, threatening to shoot if the warriors were not ordered off at once.

The king had seen Frank fire six shots from the rifle without pausing to reload, and he stood in great awe of the weapon. He showed fear immediately, and did as the boy directed.

"You are wise," said the cool lad. "If I should start this gun to shooting it might not stop till yourself and all your people were dead."

Frank kept the king under surveillance till the expedition was ready to move. As the boats were paddled up the river, the king cried out to the Commi men of the professor's party that the white boy's gun held a bad spirit that would kill them all.

But the coast savages had seen a repeating rifle before, and they simply laughed.

This day was much like the previous day, except that the party halted by mid-afternoon and prepared an encampment for the night.

By this time the natives declared they were in a region where the gorilla might be found, and Frank was very anxious to kill one of the creatures.

Ever full of restless energy, Frank proposed a hunt, and Ephraim seconded the proposal.

The professor tried to dissuade them; but he had come to regard Frank with respect, and he did not say much.

Frank's coolness and prompt action in dealing with the old king who had tried to make them pay heavy tribute for the privilege of going onward from his village had convinced Bonner that the boy knew his business and could be relied upon.

The professor had praised Frank for this act, and had been not a little surprised when he found the lad regarded it as of small consequence.

Mpomo, a Commi hunter, agreed to accompany the boys, and they selected two other natives.

The forest back from the river was thick and dark, with very large trees, the branches of which were intertwined.

Mpomo declared it was a fine place for gorillas, who shun light, open places at day, and hover in dark, secluded nooks.

The boys had heard many stories of the gorilla's strength and ferocity since leaving the Saucy Susan. With the exception of the hunters, the natives stood greatly in awe of the beast.

It was plain, also, that some of the hunters were not nearly so eager to face a gorilla as they professed to be.

Mpomo, however, seemed a rather brave and nervy fellow, and Frank was favorably impressed by his appearance.

The young Commi hunter led the way, Frank and Ephraim following, with the other Commi men bringing up the rear.

In this manner they pushed forward for at least a mile without seeing anything worth shooting.

Frank was surprised and disappointed, for he had expected to find the forest abounding with game, there being so much life along the river.

At length they came to a little strip of prairie right in the heart of the great forest. The grass was green and the natural clearing looked very pretty in the midst of the dark woods.

They were crossing this open space when all were startled by a blood-curdling scream and a bellowing roar.

A moment later a wild bull, with a leopard clinging to its back, came tearing across the clearing.

The leopard had fastened its teeth in the bull's neck, and was clinging with its cruel claws to the back of the agonized animal.

The bull bounded and reared, tossed and plunged, but all in vain, for the leopard clung with the tenacity of death itself.

The bull would dart forward a short distance, stop abruptly, wheel and whirl, but all to no avail.

There was a wild light of despair in the buffalo's eyes and a wild light of savage triumph in the eyes of the leopard.

It was a thrilling spectacle, and the boys watched it with breathless interest, forgetting their rifles were in their hands.

The bull was so blinded by pain and terror that it saw nothing of the hunters. Of a sudden it dashed straight at Ephraim, and the leopard seemed to become aware that human beings were present.

In wild excitement, Ephraim flung up his rifle and fired.

It was a chance shot, but a deadly one, for the bull dropped in a second, the bullet having reached its brain.

At the very moment that the bull fell, the leopard seemed to launch itself into the air, leaping straight at the boy from Vermont.

Ephraim could not have escaped by any effort of his own. He stood with his smoking rifle half lowered, utterly incapable of making a move to defend himself.

In watching the struggle between the bull and the leopard, Frank had stepped several feet to one side. His rifle was at his shoulder when Ephraim fired.

Frank saw the buffalo fall, saw the leopard spring, and comprehended the deadly danger of his friend.

Never was Frank Merriwell's hand

steadier than at that moment, never was his aim truer and more deadly.

Spang!—the rifle spat forth its deadly pellet.

The leaping leopard seemed to double into a ball in the air, and it dropped in a heap at Ephraim's feet, feebly clawing at the ground, a bullet through its body.

Ephraim jumped back, gasping:

"Wal, by gum!"

A great shout went up from the throats of the natives. They were filled with astonishment and admiration. Mpomo screamed:

"White boy big quick kill! Sure he have wizard spirit in him gun! Him very big hunter! Hoolray! hoolray!"

Both lads were regarded with unutterable admiration by the amazed savages, who danced with glee about the slain animals.

"Gol dern my skin!" gurgled Ephraim. "But that was a thunderin' close call! My gun kainder went off by accident, but it killed the kaow. I don't reckon yeour gun went off by accident, Frank. That was great shootin'."

"Well, I didn't have any time to spare," laughed Frank.

"Not a jiffy. Ef yeou'd stopped to think it over, that air leopard would hev hed a square meal off me, sure's shootin'."

The natives fell to skinning the leopard.

"I shall keep this skin among my trophies," smiled Frank. "Whenever I see it I shall think of you, Ephraim."

The black fellows were very skilful in their work, and it took them but a few minutes to strip the hide from the leopard. Then they set about skinning and cutting up the buffalo.

One of them started out at a run to the camp to notify the Commi men to come and bring in the meat.

"I rather fancy this ends our hunting for this afternoon," said Frank. "We did not find a gorilla, but we found some game."

"That's right, an' it's purty big game, too."

"I am satisfied with the result of the hunt."

"An' I'm satisfied so long's I escaped from bein' chewed up. I don't keer ef we don't see no gorilla, fer——"

Ephraim was interrupted by a sound like distant thunder. It rumbled and rolled through the forest, almost seeming to make the ground quiver.

Then followed the distant report of a gun.

CHAPTER VI.

FOOTPRINTS IN THE FOREST.

The boys looked at each other in astonishment and alarm.

"Great goshfry!" gurgled Ephraim Gallup, his hair seeming to lift his hat, "what in thutteration was that?"

"It sounded like thunder," said Frank; "but I do not think it was."

"No t'under!" cried Mpomo, excitedly.

"Dat gorilla!"

"What? That a gorilla? Is it possible they can make such terrible sounds."

"Poggerble?" said the Commi hunter, in a puzzled way. "Dey make um. Dunno what poggerble mean."

Mpomo sometimes mixed his English in a ludicrous manner, and he was much inclined to catch at every long word he heard the white men use.

"Ef that was a gorilla, it must be the old king pin uv all gorillas," declared the boy from Vermont.

"Him big man gorilla," explained Mpomo. "Him berry much mad when him make dat poggerble sound."

"Mad?"

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

"By de sound him make."

"Somebody fired a gun," fluttered the Yankee lad. "I k'nder guess some feller took a shot at him."

"Perhaps the shot killed him, for he has not roared since that——"

Once more the terrible booming roar sounded through the gloomy forest, apparently causing the leaves to quiver on the trees.

"Gun no kill dat gorilla," cried Mpomo, with still greater excitement. "Gorilla bad man to fool wid. Feller wid gun him in scrape."

"Then it is time we took a hand!" exclaimed Frank. "Lead the way, Mpomo. We'll look after Mr. Gorilla."

"Be yeou goin' there?" gasped Ephraim, in agitation. "I don't seem to care so gol dern much fer gorillas as I did a while ago."

"Come on, Ephraim," came sternly from Merriwell. "If you have any nerve now is the sime to show it. A human being may be in deadly peril."

"All right," groaned the boy from Vermont. "Go ahead an' I'll foller. I'd kainder like to be hoein' 'tatur naow on the old farm!"

"Mos be much claucious," warned Mpomo. "Gorilla mad, him berry bad. We find him mebbly; mebbly he be two hundred mile away when we git dere."

"By gum!" cried Ephraim. "I hope he has felt like walkin' a few hundred mile fer exercise."

Mpomo took the lead, quickly plunging into the forest which surrounded the glade. Frank and Ephraim followed him closely, leaving the other hunter to look after the buffalo and leopard until they returned or the people from the camp came.

Mpomo moved forward with great swiftness and silence, taxing the energies of the boys to follow him. It was not long before Ephraim began to breathe heavily, but Frank, being a perfect athlete, kept his "wind" splendidly.

For at least a mile the black guide led them forward through the dismal forest, and the boys were beginning to feel cer-

tain he had come too far when he suddenly halted, whispering:

"Now go claucious. Him berry near here when him holler."

"How do you know?" asked Frank.

"Know by sound."

"It does not seem possible he could have been so far away and we could hear his roar so plainly."

"By gosh!" gasped Ephraim. "I'd hate to have him holler in my ear! It'd bu'st a feller's head wide open."

"Must be still," warned the native hunter. "Him may be near. Mebbe him run away if him hear little stick break. Look out berry close where feet step."

Then they crept onward through the woods.

All at once, with a low, clucking noise, Mpomo stopped.

The boys half lifted their rifles, ready for action; but the hunter bent over the ground, a murmur of satisfaction coming from his lips.

"Look dat," he said, triumphantly. "What white boys t'ink 'bout Mpomo know how fur off dat gorilla be?"

They stepped forward and looked at the soft, moist ground where he was pointing, and there they saw a huge footprint that set the blood to leaping in their veins, for it was the track of a gorilla beyond a doubt.

There was the broad foot plainly impressed, with the thumb-like big toes standing out from the others. It was an imprint to fill the beholder with awe, for it showed that the beast must be a monster of his kind.

Ephraim Gallup's teeth chattered.

"Gug-gug-gug-great gosh!" he stammered. "He must be the old he-daddy uv all gug-gug-gug-gorillas!"

"Him pretty big," nodded Mpomo. "Bad feller to fool with."

"I ain't feelin' very well," declared the lad from Vermont. "I guess we'd better go right back to the river."

Frank paid no attention to this, but said to Mpomo:

"Follow the trail; we will follow you."

"Be still," warned the hunter. "Reddy to fire. Come."

Crouching, his eyes rolling, his figure reminding Frank of a creeping panther, the black hunter moved onward.

The white boys followed, although Ephraim's teeth still chattered.

They had not proceeded far before they came to a place where the underbrush was thick, and where, in order to clear a road for his progress, the gorilla had torn up the bushes, snapped great limbs as thick as a man's arm, and even pulled up young trees by the roots.

"Gosh! but he must have some muscle!" whispered Ephraim, admiration mingling with his fear. "He'd be a holy terror to rassle with."

They followed the gorilla's trail through the underbrush, and then, in a little clearing, they suddenly came upon a startling and horrible spectacle.

A dead man lay on the ground, his body ripped open from his breastbone downward. Beside him was a gun, the barrel of which was bent and twisted, showing what enormous strength the enraged gorilla possessed.

It was plain that the man had come suddenly and unexpectedly upon the gorilla, had fired hastily, had failed to mortally wound the beast, and the creature had closed in instantly, killing the man with one blow, after which he seized and twisted the gun.

A shout of the utmost wonder and dismay escaped Frank Merriwell's lips as he saw the dead man on the ground.

"Look!" he cried, pointing a shaking finger at the body. "It is a white man!"

"Great gosh!" fluttered Ephraim, his eyes popping from his head. "It is a white man, sure as punkins make good pies!"

"Him got kickcited," said Mpomo.

"Nebber touch gorilla when him shoot. Got to kill gorilla first pop."

"But a white man—here—alone!" came from Frank. "I can't understand that. There's something strange about it."

"Yeou bet!" nodded the other boy. "He must have bin lost."

Frank advanced a few steps, scanning the face of the dead man, which was convulsed with agony and terror.

"A sailor, I should say," muttered Frank. "And there seems something familiar about him, as if I had seen him before."

The next moment he fell back, hoarsely crying:

"Merciful goodness! I have seen him before! I know the man!"

"What's that? what's that?" spluttered Ephraim. "Know him!"

"Yes! Look—look at that face! You have seen him before—you know him. There can be no mistake."

"By gum! I believe I do!"

"Of course you do. The man's name is Ostergoth, and he is a Swede. He was a sailor on the——"

"On the Saucy Susan!"

"Sure as fate!"

The boys looked into each other's eyes in growing amazement, utterly unable to understand this wonder.

"Haow in thunder kin that be?" asked Ephraim. "We left Ostergoth on the Saucy Susan when we came away from her."

"That's what we did," nodded Frank; "but the man is here at our feet, dead as a door-nail."

"There must be some kind uv a mistake. This feller must look like the Swede, but it can't be him."

"There is no mistake," declared Frank, bending over the man and lifting his arm, from which he thrust the sleeve back. "Ostergoth had a vessel tattooed on his left arm right here, and here it is! This is the man!"

"But haow did he come here, when we left him on the schooner?"

"Ask me something easy."

"He must have deserted."

"That's plain; but I do not understand how he got so far inland in such a short time. It is a marvel."

The wonder of the boys increased as they thought the matter over. The Swede had been left behind them on the schooner, and now here he was, far from the coast, dead in the gloomy wilds of the African forest.

"If he deserted the vessel, he did not desert alone," declared Frank. "No man would leave a vessel on this coast and hurry inland amid the savages."

"Perhaps he was sent arter us," suggested Ephraim.

Frank shook his head.

"That is not at all likely. If he had been sent after us, he would have found us. Instead of that, he must have made special effort to avoid us and get ahead of us."

"Mebbe he was makiu' a rush to find the Missin' Link afore we did."

Frank thought of the strange cry he had heard in the night—the cry that had brought him from the hut in the village of Goumbi to listen in the street.

Of a sudden, Mpomo gave a cry, pointing excitedly to the ground.

"Look dat!" he exclaimed.

They looked, and what they beheld was more astonishing than anything they had yet seen.

It was another footprint. It was small and shapely, being the footprint of a female.

And that female wore a shoe!

CHAPTER VII.

ELSIE BELWOOD'S PERIL.

"Gosh all thutteration!"

Ephraim could not express his amazement. His eyes bulged, and his jaw dropped, while he actually staggered.

Frank was no less astonished. At first he refused to believe the evidence of his eyes; but he looked again and he saw yet another footprint in the soft ground.

Mpomo was on his knees eagerly searching the ground. Those footprints were like print to him; he read them as his companions would have read an open book.

"A female!" cried Frank Merriwell. "And it was not one of the native women! They do not wear shoes."

"Not by a gol dern sight!" spluttered the boy from Vermont.

"White gal make track," declared Mpomo excitedly. "White gal be here with white man. She run away fast."

"Ran away?"

"When white man shoot at gorilla. Den she run."

"How can you tell?"

"Look at wide step—look at where toes stick in deep. No heel mark at all. Dat show gal be scat an' run away."

"That's right," came hoarsely from Frank Merriwell's lips. "She ran deeper into the forest when the man shot at the gorilla."

"But who kin she be?"

Frank looked at Ephraim, but made no immediate reply. His eyes, however, told a great dread—an appalling fear—that was filling his heart.

"Look!" cried Mpomo, still pointing to the ground. "Gal run away, but gorilla him foller after him kill white mans. See him track go off dat way."

Frank saw the tracks plainly enough, and the fear in his heart deepened to horror. It was plain that the monster of the forest had pursued the fleeing female.

"But what'd he foller her for?" asked Ephraim, in a dazed way.

"Gorilla sometime carry off womens," declared Mpomo. "They steal black womans. White womans mebbly carried off."

"Come on!" cried Frank, hoarsely; "we must follow these tracks! Lead the

way, Mpomo! We must know what fate befell her."

Mpomo hesitated, and then said:

"Boys be reddy all time to shoot. No tell when gorilla come at us. White boys great to shoot. Make sure to kill gorilla quick."

"We'll kill him quick enough, if we see him," assured Frank. "Lead on, Mpomo, and do not waste time in useless talk."

They started. Ephraim slipped to Frank's side, whispering the question:

"Do yeou think it kin be her?"

"Who else?" Frank flung over his shoulder. "Ostergoth was a sailor on the Saucy Susan, and she——"

"By gum, it must be!" grated Ephraim. "We'll never stop till we find her, Frank! We'll kill that gol dern gorilla deader'n hay!"

Frank Merriwell's lips were moving; he was muttering a prayer for the safety of the girl he had last seen far away on the Saucy Susan.

Mpomo was fleet of foot, and his eyes were keen. Still he seemed to dread coming suddenly on the gorilla, for he would pause at times and listen, his whole aspect betokening fear.

Frank was impatient at every delay; he was burning with a desire to overtake the monster of the forest. He saw that Mpomo had been affected by the sight of the dead man—had lost his nerve.

Frank ground his strong white teeth together, and now and then urged the hunter to hurry along. He could barely keep his hands off the fellow when Mpomo halted for the twentieth time.

"Why do you stop again?" he grated, hotly. "Keep on—keep on!"

"Gorilla him be near," declared the hunter, his eyes rolling with fear. "Mpomo know something 'bout dat gorilla."

"Well, what do you know?"

"Him berry bad spirit."

"What's that? What do you mean?"

"Him no like odder gorilla. Can't kill him. White man nebber touch him wid bullet, and gorilla be close to white man. Dat gorilla berry bad spirit. Can't kill him."

"That is nonsense. Don't be foolish, Mpomo. We must find that gorilla, and save the white woman who is in peril. Lead on."

Mpomo protested, growing still more frightened. Frank became angry after a time, and he suddenly drew a revolver and thrust it against the hunter's head, sternly saying:

"You must follow that gorilla, or we'll leave you here on the ground, a dead Commi man. Start!"

"An' be gol dern lively abaout startin'," growled Ephraim.

Through fear of the revolver Mpomo went forward, but it was plain that he could not be depended on in case they came suddenly upon the gorilla.

They had not proceeded far before a moaning cry of fear sounded through the forest—the cry of a girl in dire distress.

That sent the blood like molten lava through Frank Merriwell's veins.

Following the moaning cry came shriek after shriek, terrible, intense, despairing.

And then sounded that rumbling roar, a sound that was horrible beyond description. It was like rolling thunder, and yet it had the mingled note of a human being and a beast in fury. It seemed to fill all the forest and to make the leaves on the trees quiver.

Mpomo fell flat on his face, utterly overcome with terror. Frank and Ephraim were rooted to the ground for a moment, but, as soon as the sounds ceased, Frank whirled and clutched his companion, giving the boy from Vermont a savage shake.

"It's the gorilla!" he panted. "He has pursued her—he has found her! We must save her—or die!"

Ephraim's teeth had been rattling to-

gether, but he braced up wonderfully, returning:

"Go ahead, Frank, I'll foller ye, ef it's a hundred roarin' devils we're goin' to meet! I'm purty gol dern scart, but I ain't even goin' ter think abaout bein' at hum on the farm. Go ahead!"

Forward they went at a run, paying no heed to Mpomo, who still lay face downward on the ground, as if he had been death stricken.

In a few minutes they broke through into an open space amid the trees, and were just in time to see a huge, hairy creature disappear into the shadows at the farther side.

"Did you see him?" panted Frank.

"Yep," answered Ephraim, staring about. "But where's the gal?"

"He had her—had her in his arms! Come on! Be ready to shoot, but take care not to shoot her."

After the gorilla they rushed, heedless, reckless, desperate. The shadows were deep beneath the trees, but they did not mind. The chivalry of their natures was aroused, and they would have dared anything just then.

They looked around, expecting to see the monster near at hand; but the brute had vanished in a most singular manner. They were about to push onward when they were startled by a cry:

"Frank—save me!"

It came from above. Looking upward, Frank Merriwell beheld a spectacle that seemed to turn his seething blood to ice-water.

A monster gorilla, nearly six feet in height, with immense body, huge chest, long, muscular arms, fiercely glaring large deep-gray eyes, and a fiendish expression of face, like some frightful nightmare vision, was clinging amid the stout branches of a large tree. With one arm this monster of the African forest held to its hairy breast a girl—a white girl—Elsie Bellwood!

Frank's worst fears were confirmed. He had hoped and prayed that it might not be Elsie; but now he knew the girl who was so dear to him was in this frightful peril. How she came there, so far from her father's vessel, he could not conceive, and there was no time for speculation on that point. She must be rescued without delay.

The crest of short hair which stood on the gorilla's forehead began to twitch up and down, while the monster showed his powerful fangs, making Frank think of the dreadful creatures, half human and half beast, which he had seen in pictures of the infernal region.

Although the gorilla did not seem to fear the boys, it held the girl between itself and them, glaring over her shoulder, thus seeming to protect itself from their bullets.

Ephraim Gallup had been chattering with terror, but now, of a sudden, he found himself wonderfully cool and deliberate. His hand fell on Frank's arm, and he asked:

"Haow be we goin' to save her?"

"If we could shoot the beast—if we could kill it—if——"

"That gol derved 'if' is a nasty word. Ef we shoot, we may hit her. Ef we don't hit her, we may not kill the gorilla, an' he may take a noshun ter serve her ther way he did Ostergoth."

Frank knew this was true. The first bullet must be deadly, or the imperiled girl might be rent limb from limb by the wounded monster.

The situation was one to rob the strongest man of his nerve, but Frank Merriwell did not lose his head.

"Get under the tree, Ephraim," he directed. "Prepare to catch her when I fire. Move lively now!"

"But you're not goin' to shoot? Yeou'll hit her!"

"Do as I tell you," came sternly from

Frank. "It is the only way to save her. Get under that limb."

Ephraim lost no more time in putting down his rifle and doing as he was directed. He placed himself directly beneath the huge limb on which the gorilla was standing, bracing himself to catch the girl if she dropped.

Then the other lad lifted his rifle and took careful aim at the right eye of the gorilla, which was seen over the girl's shoulder.

Never was Frank's hand steadier than at that moment. The rifle seemed held in a vise.

The gorilla seemed to wonder what was about to take place.

"Be still, Elsie," warned Frank, in a calm voice. "I will shoot the brute through the head."

Then he fired.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DEATH SHOT.

A scream broke from the lips of the unfortunate girl, and the rifle fell from Frank Merriwell's hands, while he groaned:

"Merciful Heaven! I have hit her!"

But even as his lips uttered the words two forms came tumbling from the tree, one of them with a flutter of garments, the other, hairy and horrible, turning over and over in the air.

Ephraim Gallup, true to his trust, caught the girl. Then he leaped aside to avoid the gorilla, which had struck close to him upon the ground, and was tearing up the earth in its frightful death struggles.

Frank Merriwell sprang forward and literally tore the girl from the arms of his friend. He gazed wildly into her face, palpitating:

"Elsie, little sweetheart, have I harmed you! If I have, I'll never forgive myself! Speak to me, Elsie!"

Her eyes were closed and her face was deathly white. A chill struck through Frank's heart like the keen blade of a knife.

"Speak, Elsie," he hoarsely whispered. "Open your eyes!"

Then he kissed her unresponding lips, lowering her gently to the ground, an expression of unutterable anguish on his handsome face.

"I have killed her!" he groaned.

"Git aout!" snorted Ephraim Gallup. "Hev yeou gone crazy, Frank! Never saw yeou make a fool uv yourself before."

"But look, Ephraim—see how ghastly she is!"

"Wal, I don't see no blood on her. Yeou never touched her at all. But yeou did shute the derved gorilla clean through ther coco. Ther gal's fainted."

"Fainted?"

"That's all."

Frank was on his knees at her side, chafing her hands and gazing earnestly into her face. For all that she was so pale, for all that her clothes were torn and her hair tangled, she had never looked prettier than at that moment. She was like a rumpled doll.

The gorilla lay quite still where it had fallen, its struggles having ceased. Ephraim went over and gave the creature a savage kick, crying:

"There, gol dern ye! try to kerry off another gal, will ye! I'll bet a good Durham kaow yeou don't!"

Having relieved his feelings in this manner, he again turned his attention to Frank and Elsie.

"She'll come raound all right bum-by, Frank," he said. "Don't yeou worry abaout that. Ef we hed some water, ur a little uv the professor's whisky, we could bring her raound right off; but I kinder guess it'll be all right ef she takes her time."

Frank had satisfied himself that Elsie was not injured at all by the bullet, but

still he was filled with unutterable anxiety. He hovered over her, rubbing her hands and calling her name, till her eyelids began to flutter, a deep sigh passed her lips, and she finally murmured:

"Frank!"

"Elsie!"

Once more he had her in his arms, looking wildly into her face. She opened her eyes, saw his face so near, and smiled faintly.

"Frank, you saved me!"

"Yes, thank Heaven! I was able to save you, little sweetheart! I feared I had killed you when you cried out; but my bullet went true, and the gorilla is dead."

She shuddered.

"Oh, the dreadful beast!" she half sobbed. "I ran as long as I had strength, and then I hid; but the great, hairy creature found me. Oh, it was horrible, horrible!"

She seemed overcome by the remembrance, shuddering and sobbing. Frank held her close to his heart, trying to calm her.

"Guess he'll git along all right ef I don't help him," said the boy from Vermont, turning away and winking at nothing in particular.

Ephraim pretended to be very busy in examining the dead gorilla during the next ten minutes, and he would have spent a longer time in this manner if Frank had not spoken to him.

"Wal, I guess she's all right now," said the Yankee boy, as he sauntered over to the young couple.

"I am, thanks to you both," said Elsie, holding out her hand to him. "I owe you a thousand thanks."

"One's enough fer me," said Ephraim. "Give t'other nine hundred an' ninety-nine to Frank. He's the feller what done the shutin', an' he ker-plunked that golder ole gorilla right plumb in the eye."

"I aimed at his eye," said Frank. "I

could see it blazing over Elsie's shoulder. Somehow, I felt that I could not miss it. It seemed like a magnet that would draw the bullet."

"It was a desperit chance," Ephraim observed. "Ef yeou'd only wounded the critter, it'd bin a bad thing fer Miss Bellwood."

"I knew I must not fail to kill it with the first shot."

"Wal, by gosh! there ain't many boys uv yeour age that kin say they have shot a real live gorilla."

"There's not another boy in the whole world like Frank Merriwell!" declared Elsie, proudly. "He is the most wonderful boy who ever lived—the bravest and the noblest!"

Frank blushed.

"Oh, come, Elsie!" he protested; "don't lay it on so thick! I can't stand it—really I can't. You don't know all the boys in the world, and so you are not competent to judge."

Although Frank Merriwell possessed a certain amount of self-esteem, he was not conceited; he did not think himself the smartest fellow in the world, which is rather remarkable considering the fortune that had befallen him and the adventures through which he had passed. Most lads in Frank's shoes would have been spoiled; but, instead of getting the "big head," Frank was learning each day how insignificant one human being really is, and he knew the world would jog along very well if he were to suddenly drop out of existence.

The adventure through which Elsie had passed had severely shaken her nerves, and had robbed her of strength. Both lads were eager to know how she came there in the forest, far from the Saucy Susan, but, understanding the state of mind she was in, they refrained from questioning her then.

Supporting her between them, and leaving the dead gorilla to be found and

brought in by some of the natives, they started for the camp.

CHAPTER IX.

A NIGHT ATTACK.

When the camp was reached Captain Bellwood and several sailors were found there. The captain was nearly distracted, and the sight of his child, alive and practically uninjured, filled him with unutterable joy. He clasped her in his arms, and actually shed tears of happiness.

When the old salt learned that Elsie had been rescued by Frank and Ephraim, who had saved her from the clutches of a gorilla, when he heard how Frank had shot the monarch of the African forest through the head, although forced to take chances of hitting the girl with the bullet, Justin Bellwood regarded both lads with unspeakable admiration.

The master of the Saucy Susan wrung Ephraim's hand warmly, but he deliberately embraced Frank, his voice far from steady, as he said:

"My little girl has said you are the most wonderful boy in the whole world, and I am beginning to believe she is right. Frank Merriwell, I owe you a mighty debt—a debt I can never pay. Anything and everything I may ever possess is yours. All you have to do is to ask."

The eyes of Frank and Elsie met for a single instant, and the girl's lashes drooped, while a warm flood of color rushed to the cheeks that had been so pale a while before.

"Thank you, Captain Bellwood," said Frank, quietly, gravely. "It makes me happy to know you feel thus toward me. Still, I do not want too much credit. Ephraim stood by me through it all, and he caught Elsie when she fell, after I shot the gorilla."

"Oh, that wan't northin' at all," spluttered the Vermonter, awkwardly. "Anybody could have done that. But it

did take a feller with haydoogins uv nerve ter shute ther gorilla an' not hit the little gal."

"Well, well, well!" cried Professor Bonner, who had heard all that passed. "And to think I hesitated about taking such boys as companions! Remarkable lads. Wonderful youths! I am proud—proud, sir!—to have them with me."

Frank was restless and longed to get away, as all this praise and admiration were far from agreeable to him. However, he had not heard how it happened that Elsie was there, and, by way of turning the tide of conversation, he asked that the matter be explained.

Then Captain Bellwood told how there had been trouble brewing among the sailors for some time, and how it had been necessary to put the irons on Ostergoth and confine him in the hold. The Swede had sworn to have revenge, and had awaited his time.

Another sailor, Bob Buntline, a restless and quarrelsome fellow, had expressed his hatred for Captain Bellwood, and the two had plotted to strike a blow at the master of the Saucy Susan.

The very day that Frank and Ephraim started up the river with Professor Bonner the captain had gone ashore, permitting Elsie to accompany him for the first time.

While the captain was trading in the village, the girl had left him for a few moments. When he came to look for her she could not be found.

Of course an alarm was raised immediately. Elsie had disappeared most mysteriously, and it was some time before the captain could learn anything of her.

At last he found that Ostergoth, Buntline, and another fellow by the name of Bill Jones were missing.

A little later it was discovered that certain natives had disappeared from the village.

Then Captain Bellwood became con-

vinced of treachery; but it was not easy to track the kidnapers and their native allies. After a time he found they had proceeded up the river, and he organized an expedition to follow.

Elsie had been lured from her father's side by Bill Jones, whom she did not suspect of treachery. Professing to have something very wonderful to show her, Jones had enticed her away, a blanket had been cast over her head, and she had been dragged into the forest by Jones, Buntline, and Ostergoth.

The three ruffians had lost no time in getting away. They had hired some natives to furnish a boat and accompany them, after which they had blackened their faces and bodies, had dressed like natives as far as possible, had placed the bound and gagged girl in the bottom of the boat, and had escaped up the river without attracting much of any attention.

Ostergoth, who was the real leader of the party, had a wild scheme to hurry up the river, pass the professor and the boys, arouse the natives, attack the professor's party, plunder it of the goods, and then go still farther inland with the girl.

The Swede did not believe they could be followed very far inland, and it was his conviction that the interior of Africa was a second Eden, where any one could lay around without work and live on wild fruits and game. He painted a very alluring picture for his comrades in crime.

Ostergoth had a scheme to become king of some inland tribe, and to hold Elsie Bellwood as his wife.

But Buntline and Jones were smitten by the girl's charms, and a quarrel arose amid the villainous trio as to which one should have the unfortunate captive.

Elsie's sufferings were intense. Much of the trip seemed like a moving nightmare. After the gag was removed from her aching jaws, she was kept silent much of the time under threats of death, but

sometimes she did break forth and express her agony in cries of distress.

Frank Merriwell had heard her cry out as she was being carried past the village of Goumbi in the night. That cry had aroused him from deep slumber, and had haunted him afterward.

As the party proceeded, the quarrel over the girl became more violent. At last it was decided that they should draw lots to see who should have her.

Jones was the one who drew her, much to the girl's relief, for, although he was a rascal, she did not fear him so much as the others.

But Ostergoth was not satisfied. He sulked, and was sullen; he declared he had been robbed.

And then, when the opportunity came, the Swede kidnaped her and fled into the forest with her.

The man must have been deranged, else he would not have attempted such a wild project. His companions followed him, swearing they would kill him on sight, and he hid in the jungle, again forcing Elsie to be silent under threat of death.

But Ostergoth simply rushed to his doom. Elsie told how they came suddenly upon the gorilla, how the sailor had fired hastily at the beast, missing in his excitement, how she had broken away and fled as the monster charged upon the Swede.

The girl had fled till exhausted, but, with the seeming intelligence of a human being, the gorilla had followed her. The brute had made her a captive, but had not offered her any harm, for the boys came upon him almost immediately, and he had fled, swinging into a tree with ease, for all of his living burden.

Then Frank Merriwell had shot the monster, and Elsie was saved.

Frank was greatly aroused when he heard the girl's story. He felt like organizing a hunting party and tracking Bunt-

line and Jones down, and he urged such a course.

Elsie, however, rejoiced at her final safe escape from the ruffians, objected to this.

"Let them go," she pleaded. "They will not dare return to the coast, and they are liable to perish in the wilds of the forest."

Captain Bellwood had been greatly aroused against the kidnapers, but he listened to Elsie's words, feeling that he must not long leave the Saucy Susan without a master.

It was decided that the captain's party should return to the schooner in the morning.

By this time night had fallen, and the hunters had not yet returned with the dead gorilla, although they had been sent out for the beast immediately upon the return of Frank and Ephraim to the camp.

Professor Bonner had been much exhausted by the day's journey, and he sought sleep at an early hour.

The black men who had paddled the boats were likewise tired, and they soon slept.

A few of the Commi men sat about the fires and told stories of Gorilla hunts. They regarded Frank Merriwell with the greatest admiration.

Captain Bellwood and the first mate of the Saucy Susan smoked and talked, while Ephraim listened, reclining on his elbow.

Where the firelight and shadows mingled, beneath the wide-spreading branches of a great tree, Frank and Elsie were sitting. In a great measure the girl had recovered from the frightful adventures through which she had passed, and, although she was tired, knowing she must part from Frank in the morning, she remained awake, chatting with him.

"You had better go back with me, Frank," urged the girl.

"Oh, no, Elsie. I have started with Professor Bonner on this search for the Missing Link, and I cannot turn back at the outset."

"But think of the perils you will encounter."

"Some way perils add a fascination to this sort of venture."

"But think of Professor Scotch, your

guardian. The poor man will go crazy when he learns of this last venture of yours."

"Not when he knows I am with Johnson Bonner, his former schoolmate and friend."

"But I am afraid to return alone to the vessel."

"Afraid?"

"Yes."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, see what befell me as soon as you left. If you had been there I do not fancy those wretches would have succeeded in carrying me off."

"Thank you, Elsie. You say that very prettily, and I appreciate it, but it is useless to urge me to return now. I am not in the habit of giving up so easily when I have set out on an undertaking."

She gave a deep sigh.

"Well, I see it is useless to talk to you; you're set as the hills, and I think you are just perfectly mean."

Then both laughed softly.

One by one, the black men were falling asleep; the fires were dying down, and the talk between Captain Bellwood and the mate had ceased. Frank Merriwell listened, a strange feeling of dread seizing upon his heart of a sudden.

It seemed that the mighty forest was holding its breath, even the droning of nocturnal insects being hushed.

The fire flared from no apparent cause, and flung fantastic shadows amid the underbrush.

What were those moving forms? Had the hunters returned with the dead gorilla? Were they silently bringing the king of beasts into the camp?

Frank leaned forward, peering sharply at the shadows. His hand sought the butt of a revolver.

"What is it?" panted Elsie in his ear, frightened by his manner.

He did not answer, but he snatched out his revolver.

"Halt, there!" he cried.

A fierce yell rang through the forest, a yell that seemed answered by a hundred echoes. Like panthers, the black shadows shot forward into the firelight. They were human beings, armed with old muskets, spears, war axes and other implements. Their faces and their bodies were painted

in many colors, and they were frightful to behold.

Some of these frightful beings who had guns began firing at the recumbent figures of the Commi men. Some of them pinned the Commi men to the ground with their long spears. Some of them brained the unresisting Commi men with war axes.

In a moment frightful slaughter had begun.

"The Bakalai! the Bakalai!" shrieked the frightened black men from the coast.

Hearing this, Frank Merriwell knew the fiercest warriors of Equatorial Africa had made this night attack.

CHAPTER X.

UNFORTUNATE ELSIE.

"Up, Ephraim — up, everybody!" shouted Frank. "Fight—fight for your lives!"

He began firing into the ranks of the assailants, taking care to make every bullet count if possible.

As Ephraim Gallup scrambled blindly to his feet a hideously painted warrior attempted to run him through with a spear.

Frank shot the warrior dead in his tracks.

Ephraim rose with his rifle in his grasp.

"Gol dern my punkins!" he shouted. "I jest wish I hed a Maxim gun! Git aout, you painted niggers!"

Then he began firing. He closed both eyes and blazed away into the thick of the attacking warriors.

Captain Bellwood and the mate got upon their feet and joined in the battle.

The Commi men seemed demoralized and unable to offer any resistance, but this was not true of the white men of the party. The sailors were slightly bewildered at first, but they realized that they must fight for their lives, and they lost little time in getting about it.

Captain Bellwood had thoroughly armed his party before venturing into the wilderness, which was very fortunate.

The Bakalai warriors continued to howl like a hundred fiends from the infernal region, and their shrieks were sufficient to unnerve an ordinary man.

But the black warriors knew little of magazine rifles and revolvers, and they

were astonished beyond measure when the white men continued to shoot without stopping to reload. That was a marvel they could not understand.

"They are wizards! they are wizards!" shouted the Bakalai in their own language.

As they saw their warriors dropping before the continued firing of the white men, consternation seized upon them. The chief sounded the retreat, and they disappeared into the darkness of the forest, vanishing like shadows, as they had come like shadows.

There were many dead and wounded on the ground, but, for all of the unexpected assault of the Bakalai, it was seen that they had suffered most. The work of the repeating rifles and revolvers had been deadly, and many of the painted blacks lay dead upon the ground.

The whites had not entirely escaped. One poor fellow had been run through with a spear, and had died quickly. Two others were wounded, and they feared the weapons which had inflicted the wounds were poisoned.

Frank Merriwell, Ephraim Gallup, Captain Bellwood, and Professor Bonner had escaped without a scratch.

As soon as it was certain the Bakalai had given over the assault and retreated, Frank turned to look for Elsie.

She was gone!

He had believed she was close behind him, and he had fought like a Trojan to defend her, now he was startled and astonished to find she was not beneath the tree.

There was great confusion in the camp. The Commi men were dispatching the Bakalai warriors who had been too severely wounded to get away, and shrieks and cries of rage mingled. Black forms rushed hither and thither. In the midst of this Frank looked for Elsie.

"Where is she?" he asked himself. "Where has she fled?"

He felt that she must be near at hand, and yet his heart was filled with alarm. He searched hastily through the camp, but found nothing of her.

The thought that she had been carried away by the Bakalai warriors was too horrible to entertain for a moment, but still it kept forcing itself upon him.

Beneath the overspreading trees he called to her, peering into the shadows:

"Elsie! Elsie! Elsie!"

No answer.

Strong hands clutched Frank, a hoarse voice cried in his ear:

"Where is she—where is my child?"

The firelight showed the smoke-grimed, anxious face of Captain Bellwood. His fingers seemed to sink into the boy's arm.

Frank lifted one hand, partially averting his head. The gesture spoke plainer than words, and a groan escaped the captain.

"My God! what has happened to her? Have they killed her?"

"She is gone."

"Gone?"

"Yes. I have searched through the camp—I have called her. I cannot find her, and she does not answer."

"But she must be near—she must be near! She is hiding somewhere! She fled to some place of hiding when the attack begun."

"We will hope so."

The entire camp was soon searching for the missing girl; but they found no trace of her. She had vanished, and the conviction that she had been carried away by the Bakalai warriors forced itself upon them.

Captain Bellwood's anguish was terrible. He prayed and he cursed. He was like a man bereft of reason.

Frank Merriwell did not say much, but his face was hard and cold, and there was a terrible glitter in his eyes. He drew Ephraim aside.

"It is my fault," he said. "I should have watched her closer."

"It ain't yeour fault," declared the boy from Vermont. "Yeou s'posed she was clost behind ye all ther time."

"But I should have made sure of it."

"Haow could ye?"

"I should have warned her not to leave me—I should have told her to remain close behind me."

"I dunno haow a feller could think uv everything in such a case as that. By gum! ther way them painted skunks jumped aout uv the dark an' began ter spear us like we was suckers was enough ter rattle anybody. We're dern lucky ter be alive."

Frank's head was bowed; his eyes were upon the ground. For some moments he was silent, hearing Captain Bellwood raving like a maniac. Then he shook himself as if awakening from a trance.

"It cannot be that she remained close behind me," he said. "If she had I should have heard her scream when she was clutched by those black fiends."

"That's so," nodded Ephraim.

"If I had heard her—well, they would not have dragged her away while I breathed!"

"I know it, Frank. Yeou'd 'a' fit, fought, an' died fer her."

"And still I feel that I am to blame—I should have protected her. I cannot help feeling that way."

"Yeou ain't to blame, gol derned ef yeou be!"

"But I shall ever feel that I am. I cannot look Captain Bellwood in the face. His eyes accuse me. I turn from them. For the first time in my life I feel like a guilty thing."

"Wal, what be yeou goin' ter do?"

"Do!" cried Frank, fiercely. "I'll not rest till I have found and rescued Elsie—or avenged her!"

"By gosh! that's ther talk! I'm with ye, too!"

Captain Bellwood was no less determined to save his child if possible, but he was too distracted to listen to reason. He believed it possible to follow the Bakalai at once, and it was with no little difficulty that he was restrained from rushing away into the forest in a wild pursuit of them.

The Commi men, being peaceable and unwarlike, had been overcome with terror and consternation by the attack of the Bakalai, whom they feared. Several of the Commi had been killed, and their friends were wailing with grief over the corpses, beating their breasts, and going through fantastic ceremonies.

Pofessor Bonner was greatly disturbed by what had taken place.

"It is most unfortunate—most unfortunate," he declared to Frank, when he found an opportunity to speak to the youth. "I fear it will ruin our expedition in search of the Missing Link."

"Gol dern the Missing Link!" exclaimed Ephraim, who was standing near.

"It's the pore little gal we're thinkin' of naow."

"That's right, professor," nodded Frank. "It is Elsie Bellwood that we must think of now. We must rescue her, or avenge her. My blood freezes when I think of the fate that may befall her amid those black devils."

"We'll do our best to find her, said the professor; "but I fear it will be a fruitless search."

"Not for me," came hoarsely from Frank's lips. "If necessary, I will devote the rest of my life to the task of tracing her and learning her fate."

"I believe you, and I hope you may succeed; but it is a terrible task you have before you. However, for the time being, I shall forget my mission in Africa, and render you such assistance as possible."

It was found that the Commi men were so badly frightened that they felt like turning back and hastening to their homes.

Frank, who had read much about the Bakalai, argued against this, telling them that this was a band of raiders who had attacked them, and that the band was far from its own people, being in a land of strangers and enemies.

The Bakalai, when on their raids, move swiftly and make short halts. The party that had attacked the camp would hasten from that vicinity, fearing that tribes of that section would be aroused against them.

The black fellows listened attentively to Frank, boy though he was. They had seen him do wonderful shooting with his guns which he did not seem to reload, and they considered him a wizard. It was not strange then that, being a magician, he should know so much of the habits of the Bakalai, even though his skin was white.

After much "palaver," it was finally decided that the relatives of the dead and wounded Commi men should take them back down the river in a boat, while the others should stand by the expedition and go forward.

Having carried that point, Frank planned to induce them to pursue the Bakalai raiders, and he was finally successful in his efforts.

The pursuit continued a full week, and

then it was said that they were on the very border of the Bakalai country, and there the Commi men revolted and refused to go farther.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DEADLY MBOUNDOU.

The tom-toms of Ouanga were beating, and the whole village was in an uproar. Men and women were screaming and rushing about like frantic creatures. All were armed, their eyes were blazing, and they seemed to thirst for human blood.

Ouanga was a large village in the heart of the Bakalai country, and to that place captive Elsie had been taken.

On the journey the two sailors, Buntline and Jones, had been seen and captured. The poor wretches were nearly starved, and they offered but a feeble resistance.

The sailors were treated as slaves, but they dared not rebel against the black men, for they had been disarmed, and were wholly in the power of their captors.

Several days had been occupied in the journey to Ouanga, and poor Elsie was nearly crazed with despair when the place was finally reached. It did not seem possible that her friends could follow her there and save her from her black captors.

And what filled her with the greatest horror was the knowledge that she was being taken to the king of the Bakalai, who had long desired a white wife, having seen a white woman once upon a time.

She was treated with the utmost consideration by the fierce, warlike black men, who, believing she would some day have influence with Adouma, their king, did not wish her to enter complaint against them.

Buntline and Jones were forced to do a great deal of heavy work and bear large burdens during the marches.

At first Elsie had pitied them, but when they looked at her there was something in their eyes that made her shrink from them, and, after a little, she began to trust more to the black men.

But it was not destined that Adouma should possess a white wife, for, within an hour after Elsie had been brought into the village, he fell ill, and his illness grew swiftly, so that he was completely prostrated in a short time.

Several doctors attended the king. They beat on drums and kettles about the bed on which he lay, trying to drive out the "evil spirits" which had taken possession of him. They made racket enough to kill a man who was moderately ill.

Adouma did not get better, despite the efforts of the doctors. On the fourth day after being taken ill he died.

Then a sad wailing filled the village and chilled the blood of poor Elsie. It was the saddest sound she had ever heard.

In the king's last moments his wives had come to him, and, one by one, had flung themselves upon him, encircling his form with their arms, pouring out torrents of endearing phrases, singing songs of love, and entreating him not to leave them, while the whole village stood around wailing their sorrow.

It was a touching spectacle. Elsie had witnessed it from a distance, and her heart had been filled with pity for the poor unenlightened black people.

The African negro has very vague ideas of the hereafter, and when a friend or relative dies he says, "He is gone, he is dead, he is no more; we shall never see him again."

And yet they believe in witchcraft, sorcery, and spirits, and they fear their dead, as a rule. The Fans, alone, who are cannibals, seem devoid of this fear.

On the day after the death of Adouma proceedings were begun to discover the person or persons who had bewitched him. It was not thought possible that he had died of natural causes.

From far up the river a woman witch doctor was brought. When she came into Ouanga no one seemed to know. She suddenly appeared in the village.

In front of the house of the dead king this witch doctor squatted, violently jangling a harsh bell. Two attendants stood near, one of them beating a board with two sticks, the other making strange and mysterious passes with his hands.

The people of the village came together on a run. The attendants motioned them back, and they stood at a respectful distance. All were armed, and the tom-toms beat. For a time great confusion existed, and then a strange and awesome silence fell on the black throng.

Elsie looked out from the door of the

hut in which she was confined, and she beheld a most horrible spectacle.

The sun was sinking, and the afternoon was drawing toward its close.

The witch doctor had on a high head-dress of black feathers. Her eyelids were painted red, and a red stripe from the nose upward divided the forehead into two parts. Another red stripe passed around her head. The face was painted white, and on either side of her mouth were two round red spots. Around her neck was hung a necklace of glass, and a little cord which held a box against her breast. This little box was supposed to be sacred and contain spirits.

About the breast of the witch doctor, and exposed about her person were several strips of leopard skins, all of which were supposed to be charmed. From each shoulder down to the hands were white stripes. One hand was painted white; the other was blood red. There was a string of small bells around her body.

This horrible-looking object squatted before a box that contained charms. On this box stood a looking-glass, beside which lay a buffalo horn, containing some black powder. This horn was said to be the refuge of many spirits.

The witch doctor had a little basket of snake bones, which she shook at intervals. She also shook some skins, to which small bells were attached.

Over and over she kept repeating a strange gibberish, while the attendant on her right beat on the board, and the one on her left made the mystic passes.

After a time the witch doctor seemed to fall into a trance.

Then a most horrible hubbub followed, gradually settling into a wild, weird chant to the spirit of the moon, which was now seen pale and wan in the sky, the sun having set.

The song was as follows:

"Ilogo, we ask thee!

Tell who hath bewitched the king!

"Ilogo, we ask thee,

Tell who hath destroyed the king!

"The forests are thine, Ilogo!

The rivers are thine, Ilogo!

The moon is thine!

O moon! O moon! O moon!

Thou art the house of Ilogo!
Why did the king die?
Who slew the king?

"Ilogo, we ask thee!
For the king is dead;
We would know who hath destroyed
him."

Fascinated and filled with fear, Elsie Bellwood watched this ceremony from the door of the house where she was confined.

Fires were kindled, throwing flaring lights on the town, and the river, which seemed to lay without current, like a sluggish pool.

At last the witch doctor stirred and sat up. Instantly an expectant silence fell on the assembled throng.

"I have seen Ilogo," declared the fakir. "Ilogo spoke to me. He told me there were three strangers in your town—three strangers whose faces are white as the face of the moon."

"It is true," muttered many voices.

"One of them is a woman," said the witch doctor. "She it was who bewitched the king."

A mad howl of fury went up from the mob.

"She shall drink the mboundou!" cried the witch-doctor.

"She shall drink the mboundou!" howled the crowd.

"But there are others," cried the witch doctor.

"There are others!" shrieked the throng. "Let us know them! They shall drink the mboundou!"

The "mboundou" is a poison decoction which the witch doctors seem able to drink in large quantities, but which invariably kills all others. By the witch doctors it is said to be a test of innocence. If the one charged with the crime drinks it and lives, it proves him innocent.

"The tall white man aided in bewitching the king," declared the witch doctor. "He hoped to become king in Adouma's stead."

"He shall drink the mboundou!" shouted the mob, waving their weapons in the air.

"The short white man aided in bewitching the king," asserted the witch doctor. "He was tired of being a slave."

"He shall drink the mboundou!"

"These are the three who destroyed the king. Bring them quickly. The mboundou shall be prepared. Bring them to me."

Away rushed the wild mob. Elsie had retreated, horrified and cowering with terror, into the house. They did not wait to enter; they tore down the house about her, and dragged her away to the witch doctor.

A great calm came to the unfortunate girl. She did not weep, and she did not show despair.

"It is better so," she said, in a whisper. "This fate is preferable to becoming the wife and slave of one of these black wretches."

She saw Buntline and Jones dragged to the place of execution. They were nearly naked, and their eyes were filled with unspeakable fear.

The poison draught was prepared, and the executioner appeared. He was a giant, fierce of face, with teeth filed to points, and stained black. He carried a short, heavy sword.

Once more a hush had fallen on the mad throng. They stood staring and waiting, quivering in every limb, their nostrils dilated. The witch doctor chanted fiercely, seeming to rejoice in her bloody work. More than ever did she look like some Satanic thing.

The "mboundou" was passed to Buntline. He shrank back. Then he was ordered to drink it, or die at once, and the executioner raised his weapon.

With a curse, the sailor took the bowl and drank. For some moments it did not affect him visibly, and something like a feeling of disappointment was coming to the spectators when he was seen to stagger.

Instantly a mad howl went up. Buntline was caught and held, and, a second later, his head fell to the ground, severed from his body by the sword of the executioner.

This bloody work was repeated with Jones. The man struggled with all his strength to resist the poison draught, but his efforts were of no avail. At last he swayed, and then that fierce howl went up again. A second later his head dropped.

Then the bowl of poison was offered to Elsie!

CHAPTER XII.

THE FIRE WIZARD.

She lifted her eyes and her lips moved in prayer. The ghostly moonlight rested on her pale, sweet face. Her golden hair, tangled and twisted, fell about her shoulders.

"Drink!" harshly cried the witch doctor.

"Drink!" roared the multitude of black men and women.

She reached out her hands to take the fatal bowl.

At this moment there was a report like the roar of many cannon, causing the ground to reel beneath the feet. On the four sides of the town clouds of fire leaped toward the sky, making the night bright as day for one fearful moment, and then dying out, to leave the darkness dense and terrible, for a pall of smoke arose and obscured the thin white moon.

The fires within the town flared and sunk, the roof of a hut fell in with a crash, and the natives were paralyzed with fear.

Then a most frightful creature advanced toward the spot where the executions were taking place. It was like a man, but every part of its body seemed glowing with fire, red flames leaped from the top of its head, in its right hand it held a whirling wheel of colored fire, while in its left hand was a squirming serpent of green and blue. It opened its mouth and poured forth a stream of fire and smoke.

"Ilogo—it is Ilogo!" shrieked the appalled natives, and they fell prostrate on their faces, covering their eyes from the frightful spectacle.

For a long time they remained thus. When they looked up, the terrible vision of fire had vanished, and the white maiden was not to be seen.

The natives looked at each other, wonder and fear written on their faces.

"Ilogo has taken her away," they said. "He has carried her to the moon! Great is Ilogo!"

Elsie had been scarcely less startled than the natives when the explosion took place and the fiery vision appeared. She

stood with the fatal cup still clutched in her hands, seeming turned to stone.

The creature of fire advanced straight toward her. When the natives fell on their faces, the flaming being flung aside the whirling wheel of flame and the squirming serpent, dashed the blazing thing from its head, with its hands beat out some burning spots about its person, and then clutched Elsie.

The girl did not cry out; fear froze her tongue. She felt herself lifted with wonderful strength, flung over a strong shoulder, carried away as if she were a sack of grain.

The girl felt that nothing more appalling could happen than had already taken place, and she resigned herself to fate.

After a little she heard the one who was carrying her begin to breathe heavily. They were beyond the limits of the town, and darkness had closed around them, pierced dimly by the misty moonlight.

"I have saved you, little sweetheart—I have saved you! We arrived in time, thank Heaven!"

She was lowered to the ground, strong arms were about her, and a familiar voice sounded in her ears.

"Frank!"

She nearly swooned from joy as the word came from her lips. She clutched him with all her strength, and she clung to him, panting:

"Don't let them take me away from you again! Don't let them kill me, as they killed Buntline and Jones! Oh, it was terrible—terrible."

"Never fear, dearest! They shall not take you from me again. They may kill us both, but they shall not take you from me while I live!"

She feared it was all a dream—feared she would awaken to find herself still a captive among the terrible savages.

"If it is a dream I hope I may never awaken!" she murmured.

"It is no dream, Elsie," he assured her; "I am here, and you are saved."

"But how can it be true? They carried me miles upon miles into this wild land. How could you find me?"

"We followed—your father, Professor Bonner, Ephraim, and myself. The Commi men came to the very borders of Bakalai land and then their hearts failed

them. Mpomo and Okandaga we induced to stand by us and follow the trail. They led us here. By our united efforts we have rescued you, although we came near being too late."

He kissed her again and again, and the joy of that moment seemed to smother her so it was with great difficulty that she could breathe.

After a time she asked:

"Father—where is he?"

"We shall find him soon. He aided in exploding the bombs which so frightened the natives. Professor Bonner is a very shrewd man, and he knew fireworks would terrify the natives, so he brought along a supply for that very purpose, in case it was necessary to give them a fright. All this afternoon, since finding where they had taken you, we have been at work manufacturing bombs, every one of which was exploded on opposite sides of the town at a given signal. Then I appeared with a fire fountain on my head, a pinwheel in one hand, and a fire-serpent in the other, while some powders burned on various parts of my person. Years ago I learned the magician's trick of blowing fire and smoke from my mouth. I had prepared for that, and it helped to paralyze the natives. The only damage I sustained came from a few burns given me by the blazing powders; but I had to beat out the flames in a hurry when I saw the trick had worked all right, and the black rascals were nearly scared out of their senses."

"It is wonderful—wonderful!" declared Elsie. "I had given up to die—I was ready to drink the poison."

When she had gained her strength somewhat, they moved toward the place of meeting agreed upon by the rescuers. When they arrived there, Captain Bellwood was waiting. He clasped Elsie in his arms, uttering a prayer of thankfulness.

The others came up shortly, and then there was a general handshaking. Mpomo and Okandaga, the two black men who had stood by them and guided them to the village where the captive maiden had been taken, were praised and promised rewards. They were very proud of what they had done.

Elsie told how she had fled in terror

when the Bakalai warriors had attacked the camp, and had run straight into the clutches of the savages. One of them had attempted to slay her, but he had been checked by others, and they had carried her away to become the wife of their king.

Although Elsie had been rescued, the little party was far from the coast in a land where perils abounded. They knew the Bakalai might recover and pursue them, and they knew they might encounter hundreds of dangers; but their hearts were strong when they turned their faces toward the Fernand Vas and the Saucy Susan.

* * * * *

They passed through many dangers during their retreat to the coast, but Commi land was reached at last, and the band was unbroken.

Mpomo and Okandaga were given many presents, so that they became two of the "richest" men of their tribe, and were much envied by the others.

Captain Bellwood gave thanks when he stood upon the deck of his vessel, with Elsie by his side. He declared it was the happiest moment of his life.

"What do I not owe to you, Frank Merriwell!" he said, regarding the boy affectionately. "Twice you have saved my child from certain death. It is not in my power to sufficiently reward you."

"It may be some time," smiled Frank, with a significant look at Elsie—a look that brought the color to her face.

Professor Bonner had not given up the project of finding the "Missing Link."

"I will penetrate to the land where those creatures are said to be, or I will leave my bones in Africa," he declared.

"Wal," drawled Ephraim Gallup, "I've had about all I want uv this country, by gum! an' I'm reddy to git aout. Frank Merriwell may be a gol dern fool an' try it aga'n but I don't believe he will."

"No," smiled Frank, "I hardly think I will. I have been prevailed upon to sail north with Captain Bellwood. There are other countries I want to see now."

Professor Bonner went back to resume his remarkable search. He disappeared into the great forests of Equatorial Africa, from which he has never come forth. It may be that he has perished in that dark

land, and it may be that he will some day come forth to astound the world with proof of the existence of the "Missing Link."

[THE END.]

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